

Legal Minds, Healing Hands

Darren Skyles Houston Attorney champions health and hope.

By Melissa Orsak

In the ever-evolving world of healthcare law, Darren Skyles provides hope through his work and philanthropy. While the world may recognize him as an accomplished lawyer and fearless businessman, he focuses on bringing relief to clients as well as his community. He devotes his career to bridging the gap between medicine and law and ensuring the most vulnerable receive the care and justice they deserve. Beyond his legal practice at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP law firm, Skyles extends his philanthropic efforts, in partnership with homelessness organizations, to bring relief to the homeless community in Houston, Texas.

Skyles began his career as a teacher of English and Philosophy at Pasadena High School in Houston, Texas. To his six-year tenure, he fondly recalled, “My years in teaching were wonderful. They taught me a tremendous amount. Probably more than anything, it taught me a lot of humility working with high school students and helped show me who I truly am.” During his years at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, where he found himself after he left his teaching career, he attended part-time evening law school at the University of Houston.

After the previous director for the M.D. Anderson Information Line resigned, Skyles eagerly stepped into that role. In this position, he provided guidance to cancer patients and their loved ones on treatment protocols and assisted them and their families in navigating the healthcare system. Despite being in law school at the time, he climbed the corporate ladder quicker than usual, demonstrating his incredible drive and willingness to work hard.

Following graduation from law school, Skyles dedicated thirteen years to serving as outside counsel for Midland Memorial Hospital in Midland, Texas. Throughout his professional journey, he

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has also worked as a partner at numerous law firms across various cities in Texas. Skyles has served as Law Firm Healthcare Practice Group Leader, Director in the Division of Public Affairs of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and Vice President of Legal Affairs at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. Eventually, he returned to his roots in Houston in 2020.

Skyles is currently working as a healthcare Partner at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP law firm in Houston, Texas. He holds the firm in high regard for “Its deep healthcare bench with 70+ healthcare attorneys currently employed.” The firm is actively engaged in

the American Health Law Association, a prominent legal association catering to healthcare attorneys. When he initially joined the firm, he was presented with the unique opportunity to help open a new branch in Houston. Skyles appreciated the firm’s support when it provided help from many offices in other major markets around the country as they opened their new location in Houston. He shared, “[My] firm is tremendously collaborative and is interested in the success of all its people. It does what it does in a very thoughtful way. I have seen the attention to detail that this firm takes and the resources it spends to make sure that its people can be successful. It’s been impressive.”

His varied experience has led him to discover that “Everyone comes to the legal profession from a different direction. Some people come from in-house, and some people do the traditional law firm route, but everyone in the best environments comes together and collaborates with one another, working with each other’s strengths and weaknesses as a team to serve the client.

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Sometimes, I think we get it in our minds that we have to do everything independently because we’ve got this degree, and everyone looks to us for the answers. I’ve learned over my career that the more I let go of that way of thinking and just focus on what I do well in collaboration with others, I meld better with what’s going on, wherever I am. Working on teams and working collaboratively enhances the client experience and work environment.”

Skyles’ highly analytical and detail-oriented nature has equipped him with the ability to organize and oversee complicated projects, marshaling required talent and resources to ensure



their successful completion. Additionally, he excels at synthesizing a multitude of information while still being able to communicate the “big picture.” Extreme awareness and sensitivity to his own and his team members’ strengths and weaknesses allow him to help his team excel.

Encountering numerous hurdles on his journey while learning these traits over the years, Skyles strove to balance full-time work, evening law school, and the responsibilities of raising three children alongside his wife, Rhonda. He acknowledges Rhonda as his “greatest support.” Together, they strive to harmonize their personal



ANTHONY CHANG, CHOC CHILDREN'S; DARREN SKYLES, NELSON MULLINS;
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and professional aspirations while keeping their faith at the forefront. Skyles says, "We continue to work on keeping God the center and focus in all we do and attribute that striving to our successful marriage; 33 years this May!"

On top of juggling family and work, Skyles's compassion and ability to connect people and ideas compel him to remain steadfast in his commitment to serving his community. Currently, he holds the esteemed position of co-chair for The Campaign to End Homelessness and Hunger, a subcommittee of the Houston Bar Association. This dedicated group focuses on tackling the pervasive issue of homelessness in Houston through various initiatives, such as organizing food drives and back-to-school drives and collaborating closely with local homeless agencies. Working with this organization brings Skyles great joy as he witnesses lives change for the better. He proudly shared that Houston has emerged as a leading model for other cities seeking effective strategies to alleviate homelessness. He shared, "The agencies here work with each other closely; they all know each other well, and they communicate and coordinate well. We are all aware it is a hard issue, and it's never going to

be solved completely, but I think they've made a pretty significant dent, and there are wonderful people doing that work."

In addition to serving the homeless, Skyles and two colleagues founded the Healthcare Leadership Quorum, HCLQ. This open quorum discusses current healthcare issues, facilitating communication between the community and healthcare professionals. The quorum last year hosted its second annual seminar at the Houston Medical Center, where they worked closely with the American College of Healthcare Executives- Southeast Texas Chapter (ACHE-SETC), Greater Society for Healthcare Risk Management (GSHRM), Healthcare for the Homeless Houston, and Society of Physician Entrepreneurs. Last October, the quorum event debuted in Los Angeles and featured three insightful panels discussing mental health, artificial intelligence, and human capital/people strategy to address healthcare shortages.

Attending a recent charity event featuring John Lucas, a former Houston Rockets player and MBA All-Star, significantly impacted Skyles. Lucas, who has battled addiction to cocaine,

delivered a powerful speech as the event's keynote speaker. He shared his personal struggles and emphasized the importance of acknowledging and embracing his weaknesses. Lucas poignantly discussed the difficulty people have with accepting life on life's terms. He went on to explain how he channeled this realization into helping others. Skyles was struck by Lucas' vulnerability, particularly as someone who appeared to have it all. Lucas illustrated the importance of remembering that everything is what one has now, which resonated deeply with Skyles, who strongly desires to share this message with others.

Skyles embodies compassion and proactiveness in serving others, even amidst the tumultuous nature of life. His insights and open-mindedness bolster his invaluable wisdom for law students and individuals navigating the challenges of the world. According to Skyles, "Let go and let God" is his guiding principle, particularly in the demanding landscape of his profession,

where one often does not feel fully equipped to face its daunting challenges. He shares, "Do the best you can every day with the God-given talents you are given and the experiences you have been given and let God take care of the rest. Things get challenging when I forget that, when I think I have to do it all, and that it's all on my shoulders." Ultimately, Skyles' perspective underscores the importance of embracing each day with grace, focusing on the bigger picture, and taking life one step at a time.

"I think law school beats into you that we all have to be perfect. Only the highest grades get the best jobs. All of that is just a lot of smoke and mirrors because you're going to end up where you need to end up based on what you have to offer the world, and the earlier you accept that and embrace that, the better." Skyles uses all he has been gifted to positively impact the healthcare industry and his community in and out of his practice.



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